

Meeting Date: May 16-18, 2007

Agenda Item No.

Agenda Item:

Bureau Chief Approval: _____

Prepared by: Steve Yundt, Chief, Fisheries Bureau

Background: Mr. Yundt will discuss the Mountain Whitefish Conservation and Management Plan for the Big Lost River Drainage developed by the Department. The Department and other parties have increased planning efforts and implemented conservation actions to offset recent declines in the distribution and abundance of mountain whitefish in the Big Lost River drainage. This population is isolated from and genetically distinct from other mountain whitefish populations in the Snake River Basin. Sampling has indicated that mountain whitefish currently occupy around 24% of their historical range in the Big Lost River drainage, while adult abundance is only about 1.5% of historical levels. Potential factors affecting Big Lost River mountain whitefish are described in the plan. Specific population objectives are identified both above and below Mackay Dam. A number of management actions are presented to enhance habitat and population numbers.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues: The 2007 – 2012 Fisheries Management Plan identifies the specific development of a species management plan for mountain whitefish in the Big Lost River drainage of eastern Idaho. The Department's strategic plan has a goal to "Improve public understanding of and involvement in fish and wildlife management." This species management plan considers public desires and biological needs and sets management direction and goals. The Commission establishes policy and provides direction, considers input from the public, and has the authority to adopt, amend, or reject Department-recommended plans. The Fisheries Bureau seeks Commission approval of the Mountain Whitefish Conservation and Management Plan for the Big Lost River Drainage.

Public Involvement Process: The Department posted the management plan on its website in late March 2007 and solicited comments from the public and others throughout April 2007. A summary of comments received and the Department responses are being provided for Commission review.

Staff Recommendation: The Fisheries Bureau is seeking Commission approval of the Mountain Whitefish Conservation and Management Plan for the Big Lost River Drainage.

Justification: There has been a recent emergency petition for listing the Big Lost River mountain whitefish as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. The Department believes it is in the best interests of the state fish and wildlife agency and other involved parties to have a Commission-approved species management plan in place to guide staff efforts in managing this native fish species. Public comment has been appropriately considered and incorporated. The plan is ready for approval by the Commission.